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A NEW TYPE OF CLASS BOOK¹ INDIVIDUALIZING THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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One of the disadvantages of our present educational situation is that, owing to a lack of sufficient teaching force, students are herded in large classes and a greater number of students are assigned than can be adequately taught by one teacher. Particularly in the subject of English this wholesale method is fatal to good results. Perhaps more than any other subject English must be taught individually, both in the impressions from contact with books and periodicals and in the expressions, oral and written, secured from the student.

Ideally, of course, this means few students per teacher, small classes, and ample time for the teacher to learn particular needs and to apply particular resources. Practically, as matters stand, it means that English is not taught individually at all. This is not a criticism of the teachers. They work hard, for the most part, correcting thousands of papers, laboriously red-inking errors until they impair their eyesight, breathing apparatus, and circulation. One difficulty is that *they cannot possibly remember the particular weakness or power of each student*; they cannot particularize; they cannot individualize. When they attempt to recall a student to memory for strategic teaching purposes, their impressions of his recitations, papers, and personality are blurred into a composite, including a whole class, or mayhap the hundred and thirty students in their charge, a generic image, or conglomerate. In other words, the teacher does not really know her "patient" and is in no position

¹ Superintendent H. P. Smith, of Newton, Iowa, adapted this device, at the writer's suggestion, for use in his system, and reported it in the *Journal* for October, 1917. The cards as there used provided a record for written work only. Similar record cards are now in use in a number of the schools of New York state.

either to judge him, in giving him a grade, or to prescribe for him, in an attempt to help him to a larger life through her subject.

What a doctor needs who comes to a patient at the point of death is not the fact, sufficiently obvious, that his man is in a bad way, but data at least specific enough to indicate whether he is suffering from tuberculosis or has been hit by a cyclone. The first thing a teacher needs who comes upon a student in a serious condition as regards her subject is an individual and specific record of his limitations and his powers.

At present the only record in the hands of 99 per cent of the teachers of English, aside from a hazy mental image of a given student, is a class book which sums up all that the teacher has to say or do about a given student in a numerical estimate or a letter. Thus, John Brown is recorded on September 5 as 35 per cent, or as "D" or "F," as the case may be. This is the apotheosis of symbolism. But for real teaching purposes it is worth virtually nothing; indeed, it is not only negatively vacuous but positively vicious, as concealing from the teacher the shallowness of her preparation and fitness to deal with the case. The typical class book, and incidentally the whole system of grading and ranking pupils, is one of the most abortive and farcical prostitutions of the educational process.

Obviously a very valuable device to help this condition would be an adequate and available record. The form on page 435 is a device which will enable a teacher, without significant loss of time, to assemble upon one sheet detailed data bearing upon the problem presented by a particular student. These loose-leaf graph forms are to be kept alphabetically and by classes in the teacher's notebook and may be made in sizes convenient for filing. Each record is loose in order that the record may follow the student if he is changed to another teacher.

As will be seen, the sheet provides under its large headings for records of the student's written and oral work and for personal data which may prove valuable in adapting the teaching or course to his needs. The space given for records of his written work provides a column each for the date and number of his composition and is then subdivided into the record of form elements, of construction

[illegible]

elements, and of general comment. "Form" covers mechanical details, including handwriting, indorsement, margins, title, paragraphing, punctuation, capitalization, and folding—the carpentry of writing. Blank space is left for other items which, in a particular case, may appear. "Construction" comprehends the way words and sentences are put together—essentially the grammar of the work. Columns are given for checking the blunders ubiquitous in secondary-school work—the incomplete or "dangling" sentence or clause, the runover sentence, vague use of pronouns, subjects and verbs disagreeing in number, violations of clearness, with several blank columns again where powers as well as weaknesses should be checked up. "Personal" includes space for items such as are indicated on the form. In the "Personal" division the data must be written out, but in the mechanics and grammar division a check serves, securing a detailed record at the least expense of time and effort. Under "Written Work," also, is included a column for recording the student's misspelled words, gathered by the teacher from his themes, his board work, or other courses where the misspellings are reported. By the time a record has been made of a dozen pieces of written work, or less, the teacher is in possession of specific data which locate the precise difficulties and the tendencies toward power of the student. Thus it is possible to establish a dead line for a particular student in a particular error and to root it out of his practice instead of merely submerging it until forgotten by the teacher; thus, too, the teacher may encourage the abilities noted. At present, as the records of the college entrance examinations for last June show, 60 per cent of the secondary-school candidates fail to pass the entrance examinations in English essentially because they are lacking in the fundamentals covered by this device. Through lack of evidence or record, rudimentary errors persist in the student's practice from the first year of high school to graduation and beyond.

Under "Oral Work" space is given for jotting such details as are suggested in the form, posture, quality, pitch and range of voice, enunciation, pronunciation, rate, subject, inclusiveness, conciseness, interest, organization and structure, caliber of thought, etc.

Under "Personal" are included the student's age, address, school program, favorite school subject, work outside of school, social activities, hobbies, plans for the future, favorite reading, useful home facts, or other items which may be used as vital assets in making teaching and course most worth while.¹

The values of this form, then, may be summarized as follows:

1. It secures with the shortest possible expenditure of time a detailed, individual, and permanent record of the student's work in English, written and oral, and of the elements of his life usable by the teacher in making her subjects most rich and profitable for the student.

2. Although it requires time to keep, it saves time and teaching waste in three vital ways:

- a) It makes possible a dead line for particular students in particular errors, and so roots out a bad habit instead of merely submerging it temporarily.

- b) It enables a teacher, on the basis of a review of her class records, to determine from scientific evidence and record, instead of the present basis of vague impression, exactly what errors are sufficiently general to justify giving class work to their correction, and what errors are individual or peculiar, to be handled in conference outside the class period. In other words, she locates her

¹ In passing it is worth while to emphasize the fact that in English, particularly, the teaching process, if refined and effective, must be a delicately personal and individual one. To make progress intelligently the teacher must know not only the resources of her subject but the resources of her student as well. With a sick student's address at hand, it may pay big human dividends to drop a friendly note, "We miss you at school, and are sorry. From experience, I realize that measles are rash," etc. Age, when exceptional, may explain at a glance conditions otherwise puzzling and may change one's teaching policy toward a student entirely. The school program is valuable in various ways; it shows retardations, heavy or light programs, and it enables one to reach a student at any period, if desirable, with forgotten individual assignments or other calls. Favorite school subjects and hobbies of students offer invaluable teaching ammunition both in composition work and literature and often give a hint to the teacher which helps her to modify the pupils' plans for the future and do some intelligent vocational guiding.

All of these things may be written upon the recording sheet by the student in ten minutes, if he has a day or two to consider them.

The value of home facts—father and mother separated, family desperately poor, brother a big league baseball player, etc.—in individualizing teaching is obvious. The teacher should jot down any such information which comes her way.

enemy scientifically and destructively instead of merely "blazing away."

c) The record goes to the next teacher of English, who inherits the vicarious effort of her predecessor instead of wasting three months learning what the other teacher already knows.

3. It makes it possible to measure the progress of each student scientifically, even to the point of graphing his performance at intervals, if desirable. The cards may be filed by the school administration as records of the student's progress throughout his school life.

4. From the administrative angle the record thus becomes valuable as a partial index of the growth and capacity of teachers as well as of students.

5. Such a card, or a modification of it, may be kept by students in their English notebooks as a measure and check upon their own work.

The arguments against this record may be listed and met as follows:

1. In the hands of a bookkeeper it becomes mere bookkeeping. A real teacher, however, will see to it that the data recorded *function* in the life of the student and are recorded in habits rather than upon paper. This may best be accomplished through individual conferences, but comments may be individualized in class.

2. It will require an impossible expenditure of time to keep this record. (See point 2 above.) Two devices are suggested in case the teacher cannot find time to use the record every time for every student:

a) Take a record only every third or fifth time the student gives opportunity for one. Tendencies are caught as truly and may guide work.

b) Center the recording upon the most needy or weak students, or those whom you hope to promote only by the most careful teaching.